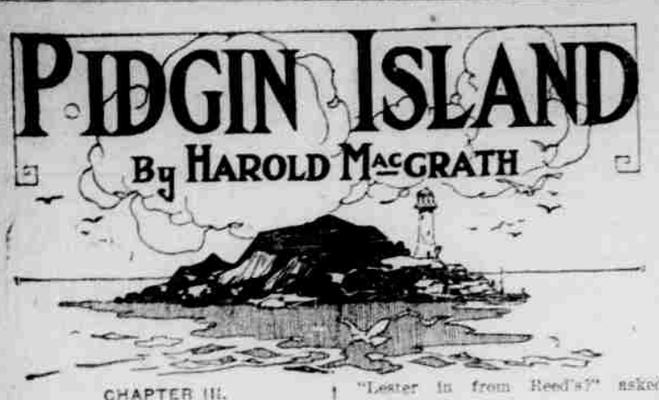
PIDGIN ISLAND

By HAROLD MacGRATH



CHAPTER III.

"They Ain't No Sech Thing!"

IT was raining pitchforks.

Across the river, through the opalescent blur, one could see the old sou'westers piling up on the point, just a little farther each time, for a wild sea was running in from the lake.

You could hear the waves roar as they broke against the granite promontory, two miles away. Sometimes there would be seething white patches on the river's face—where the wind spitefully smashed down the rain. One or two hardy souls were fishing hopelessly along the mainland ledges, where there was a bit of ice. The knowing fisherman, however, saved his bait.

The bass by now were all out in deep water, for the black fellow doesn't like the seasicky rollers any more than his hunter does. Besides, what was more important, bait had left the shallows and gone out of the reach of the mud.

It was a day for poker, the telling of tales or reading and snoozing or tinkering in the boathouse.

And tinkering in the boathouse was precisely what Uncle Billy was doing.

Ranged along the top of his workshelf were dozens of spark plugs. Next to bringing home a four pounder he liked to tinker. His attitude and outlook were identical to those of the village doctor—no matter how well you looked or felt, something wrong could be found going on in your insides.

Only Uncle Billy acquired no profit in his diagnoses. With a grease smudged hand he nursed his stubbly unshaven chin.

"Gast it, seven plugs, 'n' not one of 'm wuth a darn! What's folks seilin' these days, anyhow?"

"Search me," said a voice from the rear doorway.

"By jings"—Uncle Billy wiped his fingers on a piece of waste and trotted to the door—"I didn't know they wa'n't no sech thing as a ghost! How are you, Mr. Cranford. When'd y' git here? 'S mornin'? Well, well! A feller gole outside. Rainin' barb wire [illegible] forks. No bass in shaller wa[illegible]. We'll try Horning dock 'n' [illegible] th' wreck in Sand bay. Oh, joshua! I can't row you, Mr. Cranford. Got a party. No idea how long she's goin' t' stay neither. Why d'n't y' write me?"

"One at a time, Bill; one at a time. Go back to your work. I'll tell you all I know when I've prowled about and kind of soaked this picture into my soul."

Cranford shook the water off his hat and stamped his feet.

He had come cross lots, through the high grass, and the very skwunch-skwunch of the wet leather on his feet was music, an obligato, to the slap-swish, slap-swish of the river which sprawled over and about the runway sloping down from the boathouse doors.

This was air, washed clean, clear from the heavens, undefiled by smoke or dust or contact with living things, nectarous, God's own.

He leaned against the jamb, breathing, breathing, with a little smack of his lips just before he let the breath go. He wanted the good of it in his veins, in his marrow. In another day he would forget that he had ever been anything but an outdoor man, of simple habits, simple thoughts.

How well he knew every nook and corner of these wonderful waters! Europe, Asia, Africa and the south sea isles, North and South America he knew, but none of them called like this quiet but rugged spot. Often while sitting on the balconies or verandas of notable foreign hotels his thought had annihilated the distance.

He could see boat after boat coming in toward evening, the catch thrown carelessly on the dock; he could hear the banter of the bronzed guides, the bragging of the fishermen and the hotel bartender's polite "Well, what luck today, sir?"

Uncle Billy, vainly pretending to squint at the business end of a spark plug held between his eyes and the light, watched his young friend covertly.

Didn't look as fit as usual. Been staying up late and lying abed mornings. Two or three days on the water would take that look out of his face.

"Lester in from Reed's?" asked Cranford presently.

"Yestiddy."

"Any one got him?"

"Nope. I'll have him around at th' hotel after supper. He'll be tickled t' death t' row you. He's in luck. Two good fishermen in one season. He's th' best guide up here. Mighty good o' you t' stick t' me all these years. But y' see, it don't make no difference t' you who rows. You know where t' go 'n' how t' fish, 'n' when you don't git 'em nobuddy does."

Cranford laughed, and instantly it occurred to him that this was the first time he had laughed honestly in months.

"Y' see, Lester's a horned guide. What he don't know 'bout birds 'n' fish— Why, th' game commissioners could go t' school with him 'n' larn a hull lot. Bring th' guns?"

"Yes."

"Lots o' black duck this year. Th' mallard ain't showed up yet."

"Who is the lady you are rowing?"

Uncle Billy laid down the spark plug gently. "You'll think I'm stuffin' you, but I ain't, Mr. Cranford. Say, I'd like t' see you 'n' her in th' same boat on a day when they ain't bitin' fast."

"Oh-ho! Off with the old love, on with the new! Do you mean to tell me that you have at last found a woman who knows how to strike a bass?"

"Guess so. Only woman I ever see who gits 'm out at Pidgin. An' when she strikes 'em she ain't makin' no effort t' hit 'm, 'em down t' Oswego."

Cranford shouted. "Billy, you're good for my soul."

"An' you're good fer sore eyes, Mr. Cranford. Fished you when y' wore short pants. Your paw was some fisherman, I tell you!"

"He was a good man to his son, Billy."

Cranford stepped away from the gasoline tank and reached under his raincoat for his pipe. He sat down on a soap box at Uncle Billy's side and smoked for awhile in silence.

"What's she look like?"

"O-ho!" mimicked Uncle Billy. "I thought y'd be askin' that. Well, I don't know what you'd call her, seein' 's you're seen all kinds o' purty womin in your caudin's. She ain't more 'n twenty-two. Her name's Wynne. An' there y' we. Nobuddy knows nuthin' more—where she comes from, who 'er folks be, 'n' all that. She's stayin' out at th' farm. She ain't one o' them sassiety folks, 'cause she ain't got no lugs. Jes' 's easy t' git along with 's you are. Why, say! I fished a man in June who let his sinker rest on bottom all th' time, an' cussed me 'cause we didn't git no luss fer shore dinner. Honest!"

"Is she pretty?"

"O-ho!" Uncle Billy cocked his battered haymaker's straw hat over his ere. "What d' you call purty?" diplomatically.

Cranford smiled up into the sun bitten, wind bitten face. "Well?"

Tap-tap!

Cranford stood up, while Uncle Billy reached hurriedly for the waste, wiping his hands on it thoroughly, with a finishing scrape along the sides of his grease stained, paint stained jumpers.

The latch clicked, the rear door opened and a young woman entered.

Her raincoat sparkled and flashed, tendrils of rain drenched hair straggled down her cheeks from under an ordinary sou'wester, her heavy tans oozed from lace to sole and a diminutive rainstorm pattered down from the hem of the coat.

"You, Miss Wynne, in all this rain?" gasped Uncle Billy.

"Came in for the mail and something to read! Oh, I beg your pardon!"

Cranford's pipe, with its smoldering coal, went into a pocket; his hat off his head.

A Diana, adaptive to the modes, health and beauty were written in ev-

The Rear Door Opened and a Young Woman Entered.

ery line of her face, with a hint of distinction and breeding in the calm, untroubled eyes.

"This is Mr. Cranford I was tellin' you 'bout, Miss Wynne." Uncle Billy's wave of the hand was meant for an introduction.

That Cranford and the young woman might be at the poles socially did not trouble him. He would have presented a stevedore to a grand duchess, happen they both stopped long enough in his boathouse.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Cranford."

She did not offer her hand, but she was as quick to read distinction and breeding as he was. "I feel as if I'd been poaching. Uncle Billy"—how oddly the name sounded from her lips!—"has been your guide so long that you will not enjoy the sport without him."

"Don't you let that worry y' none, Miss Wynne," interposed the guide. "He's goin' t' have Lester, who can outrow 'n' outfish die any day in th' week. 'N', between you 'n' me 'n' th' gatepost, he'd rather have 'im." Uncle Billy's sentences sometimes resembled the buzz and murmur of bumblebees.

"Billy, I'd rather have Lester than any one besides you."

"Taffy!" sniffed Billy. "I got a sweet tooth yet; go on."

The girl laughed freely. Music.

She walked to the runway and peered out. "It will be clear by sunset," was her comment.

Uncle Billy looked at Cranford as if to say: "There! What 'd I tell you?"

"The rain will wear down the wind. I shouldn't be surprised if we had flat water tomorrow. How about bait?"—still with her gaze upon the rolling mountains which crossed the river.

"Plenty in th' car at th' big boathouse. We'll jes' haff t' fish Pidgin. They won't be anywheres 'cept in deep water."

"You have fished Pidgin, Miss Wynne?"

"Yes, and I dare say you have, many times."

"Since I was fifteen, when we had to row out there."

"Twenty year ago," supplemented Uncle Billy, sighing reminiscently.

"That's a fine way to treat a friend!" exclaimed Cranford. "Telling my age like that!"

Another ripple of laughter from the girl.

"Have you noted the variety of currents out there?" she asked. "One day you can fish straight down the ledge; another, the line forms a curve back to the shoal, and again you can't do anything but ride up and down the bar."

"Pidgin is all right in July and August, but this time of year the wind blows from all points of the compass in a day, and it's a bad place for a man to fish. Billy ought not to take you out there except when the water is flat."

The tone of his voice conveyed disapproval.

"A motorboat is only as strong as its engine. I was blown out to Galoo once in September. A norther came up all of a sudden. For awhile we thought it was all up with us. They found us the next afternoon, half dead with cold and hunger."

"I'm not afraid," she replied to this open warning, which was only an echo of Uncle Billy's.

Her chin stood out a little.

"I love it out at Pidgin. It is wild and free there. If a gale comes up one cannot run back to the hotel—nothing else to do but fight it out. I was born at sea."

She turned her face toward the rain again.

"Hey! Mr. Cranford, I smell sumpin' burnin'."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Cranford, making a dash past the girl and out on to the slippery runway.

He knelt quickly, soaked his pocket and extracted his pipe.

"What a terrible thing forgetfulness is!" observed the girl gravely, though her eyes twinkled. "And I have been used to tobacco smoke for several years."

"It's mighty good of you not to laugh," said Cranford, with a rueful look on his face. "That's my favorite pipe, and it will take three or four days to sweeten it again."

"Like 'n' 'arn," Uncle Billy said, sweeping up his spark plugs and dumping them into a box.

He then reached under the bench into a pail and brought forth a handful of scarlet harvest apples.

And immediately there were sounds (pianissimo, moderato and sforzando) which are permitted only among truly democratic individuals.

It was the final stroke. It accomplished more than all the polished phrases of social diplomacy could have done. Till the end of time these three would be more than casual acquaintances.

At length Miss Wynne announced that she must be going.

They were waiting for her at the village postoffice. Cranford held the door for her. She smiled and nodded. Alone outside, the rain drumming on the sou'wester, she eyed the scudding leaden fogs overhead.

"Cranford! I must be very careful. Why is he here at this time? And I am so alone—so alone!"

She stepped forward resolutely, as one born to the open; the heavy, dank grasses swished and slapped about her shoes.

When she reached the wooden sidewalk she paused for a moment to stamp her feet, then hurried on into the village.

"Well?" said Uncle Billy triumphantly.

"Billy," Cranford drawled, burlesquing a facial bewilderment to hide his real confusion, "Billy, they ain't no sech thing!"

CHAPTER IV.

A Spy.

"THAT coat o' yourn 'll haff t' go t' th' tailor. Th' rain 'll wear down th' wind. Ever hear a woman talk like that?"

"That's what I meant, Billy; we've just been dreaming. I've fished up here, as you say, twenty years, and I never heard any other woman say so much in so little. And if you say she knows the game that's enough. Born at sea. Did you hear her say that?"

Uncle Billy nodded.

"It's more'n I've larned th' hull week. No wonder she ain't afraid o' Pidgin 'r Charity. But that ain't it."

"What isn't?"

"Th' thing that gits me she ain't never be'n up here before. I didn't haff t' ask 'er that. An' th' firs' thing she sez, 'Is you think we can git out t' Pidgin islan' t'morrow?' That kind 'a' flabbergusted me. Only them that knows ever talks o' Pidgin."

"And you toddled right out there, with never a word of the risk."

"Mr. Cranford, I be'n married thutty year."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I don't argy none with womin. She wanted t' go t' Pidgin. T' Pidgin she goes. You needn't worry. I ain't hankerin' after suicide. Wouldn't take th' king o' England out there 'f it didn't look good. Nuthin' panicky 'bout Miss Wynne. She ain't cryin' none fer life belts. An', man, I like 'er. She's one o' them rary avises y' read 'bout. An' what d' y' think? Picked up two orioles an' a yeller bird that'd busted their heads off against th' light an' had a privit funeral back o' th' lightkeeper's boathouse. Buried 'em. Odd bein's, some o' them—huh?"

"Tender hearted—h-m. Kills Mr. Bass with pleasure, but weeps over little dead birds. How do you add that up?"

Cranford took out his pipe and wiped it inside and out with a bit of waste.

"I ain't addin'," answered Uncle Billy, flinging his third apple core into the basin outside, where some hardy perch snubbed it about as if playing water polo.

"I've fished her fer a week now an' ain't brought back nuthin' but th' bleeders. Lets 'em go every time they ain't hurt."

Cranford settled his hat firmly and turned down the brim.

"If she does that, Billy, you're right. She is a rary avises, as you call them. How's the old Navarre running these days?"

"Same's usual."

"I see. You will not let off tinkering with her."

Cranford patted the gunwale. The name always stirred his sense of humor. It had been Billy's selection.

"Navarre," some one had said. "That's a good name."

"You bet!"

"Name of a king."

"An' any queen might be proud o' nummin' her son after a boss that could run like that 'n'."

After the unmerciful banter which had annually followed this episode some guides would have hastened to change the name.

Billy clung to it stubbornly. He clung to his opinions stubbornly, his weather prognostications, his lore concerning bass.

He erred sometimes because he was human, but the saying went that when he couldn't drop his mudhook over a school of bass it was time to pack up the rods.

"Well, send Lester over to the hotel after dinner tonight. He'll find me in the billiard room. I've got some letters to write before lunch. And maybe I'll find some mail."

"All right. I'll see t' Lester."

"And tomorrow I'll go out to Pidgin and hook 'em right from under your old mud scow."

"Uh-huh! I've heard 'em say that before. I'm tellin' you she can fish. An' I don't know 's I want t' fish you now anyhow."

Cranford filled his pockets with apples.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet a box of any cigars in the village that I beat you out tomorrow."

"Fifty cigars against fifty apples 'n' I'll go you."

"Done."

"Ten cent straights?"

"Two for a quarter if you like. By-by! It was good to see you again, Billy. By the way, has any one caught a four and a half pounder over in the gut at Horseshoe?"

"Not that I've heard tell of. Oh, y' needn't worry. That ol' sogger's nosin' around there yet. That's what comes o' tryin' them newfangled hooks. He'll go five now 'f some blame pumpkin-eel ain't et him up sidewise. But I'm savin' him for Miss Wynne."

"Pike!"

"That's right; spring one o' them foreign words on me as 's I can't talk back."

Cranford stepped outside into the rain. The sky promised no letup. There wasn't a break anywhere, but these sudden squalls of wind and stinging sheets of rain he read sailorwise. Before sundown the storm would be gone.

Where had the girl picked up such lore? Born at sea, so she had said. Perhaps a sailor's daughter. But in that case fresh water would not appeal to her. And where had she learned to fish for bass? Wisconsin, Maine, the Rideau?

The sou'wester, the dripping raincoat, the soaked shoes, were as vivid to his understanding as written words. Here was a girl out of the ordinary, brave and resourceful, perhaps companionable, an essential lacking in nine-tenths of the women he knew.

Wynne.

It was a good name, but he could not recollect having heard it episodically. Some millionaire's daughter, probably, who did not depend upon others for her amusements. The world was changing its habits fast.

Women carried banners through the streets, rode airships, successfully cantered in and out of the stock market along with their biscuit making. So long as the biscuit remained light and edible what mattered the ballot?

A telegram awaited Cranford at the hotel desk.

It was from Warren, in the code upon which they had long since agreed. The reading of it did not cause Cranford any pleasurable emotion.

It announced that his rooms had been entered and papers scattered about. Much good that would do them.

Still he wired back. "See if small morocco notebook is in secret drawer at side of my shaving dresser." Not one chance in a million of their stumbling upon that drawer.

And yet he was not dealing with ordinary men.

There were other Empire shaving dressers. The little worry grew as the hours went by. If that notebook was gone, gone likewise would be his occupation, for within its covers was the whole story, from the first to the last exploit, together with his profits.

Heretofore he had carried it on his person, but the mysterious riffing of his luggage in the stateroom crossing had made him wary. He cared nothing for threats or physical encounters, and doubtless they knew this. To speak in the vernacular, they were after him where he lived.

Once his occupation became known publicly goodby to many things. No money in the world would make up for what he would lose. He knew his kind tolerably well. They would quietly request him to resign from his clubs, and presently door after door would close in his face.

If he stood out in the open as a hunter of great criminals, a detective, he would be lauded for his work, written up in the magazines, celebrated. But deep in the heart of every trav-

The Jewel Case Changed Hands.

eler there abides a smoldering fire, low yet ugly, against all customs—its agents especially, here or abroad.

This rebellion is as old as man. He hates to pay tribute, justly or unjustly.

Spy.

He was that, no more, no less. And he faced outlawry because he wanted money, ease, pleasure, idleness. Not one extenuating circumstance; it was the blood of his grandfather crying out in him. For years a clique of men had been smuggling successfully.

They had brought into the country three or four millions in rare gems. The federal authorities had spent thousands trying to find out who these men were and how they worked. Cranford's discovery of three of them and the manner in which they worked had been the result of an accident.

One man purchased the gems, another man carried them to the boat, while a third did the actual smuggling.

Sales of gems would be reported; the original purchaser followed and watched, and that would be the last of it.

The actual smuggler Cranford laid by the heels. The other two he could not touch, as they continued to live in Paris; but he had spoiled their usefulness. From this incident he learned that they always worked in threes. The chief of this clever, resolute band laid his plans, and three unknown men proceeded to execute them.

The breaking up of this trio warned the chief that the first wedge of the secret service had been driven home.

If the quarry remained surround by mystery, the hunter was no less intrenched. They were reaching out in the dark for each other when Smend's accident happened.

More guesswork had brought about the discovery of the hollow crutches. Item, Smend was doubtless the arch smuggler. But on his side he knew who had tripped him up. Smend could still plan, but Cranford would have to carry on the work against men wholly unknown to him. In other words, chance only would lead him from trio to trio.

Coincidents: Cranford's appearance in the jewel shop in the Rue de la Paix; his careless inquiries of the jeweler.

Oh, yes, the young gentleman was a first class customer; bought numerous jewels for the ladies of the opera, as their agent, however.

He was a Frenchman.

Immediately Cranford had lost interest. But while having tea at the Cafe de la Paix, an hour later, he had seen the young Frenchman again in conversation with an American. The jewel case changed hands.

Still he had no definite suspicions, and the whole matter passed from his mind. Two days later he ran down to Cherbourg to bid some friends bon voyage. The American he had seen in the Cafe de la Paix was handing a package to another compatriot.

The latter sailed.

It was one of those inexplicable fancies, but he surrendered to it; cabled the port of New York to be on the lookout for a portly, smooth faced man with a patch of white hair in the back of his head; to search for a necklace of sapphires.

A chance shot in the dark hit the bullseye. The unknown upon arriving in New York was held up and the gems confiscated.

And now they were after him.

With the notebook in their possession his days of usefulness would be at an end, a general apocalypse.

At 5 o'clock the rain ceased. The gale was by now brawling somewhere off the banks.

The river was no longer crested. Boats were flitting to and fro, and the sullen big freighters were drawing out from the breakwater in the basin back of the hotel. A gorgeous sunset finished the day, warm and promising good weather.

The hotel was almost deserted.

It was not a summer resort. Those who sought its charms were fishermen. They sent their wives elsewhere.

Cranford sat down to dinner with four other men, two of whom he knew to be retired business men who fished these waters from July to October and then hied away to Miami for tarpon or to the Pacific for yellowtails.

Reminiscences passed back and forth. Cranford learned that the season had been exceptionally good, but that out at South bar and Charity shoals the sport had been the worst in years.

For some reason or other the bass had turned those places over to the bane of the sportsman, old goggle eye, piscatorially known as the rock bass.

Button bay, over the river, had proved a find. One of the gentlemen had caught a four pounder at Horning dock. Bait had been lively, and there had been plenty of it despite the usual August blow.

Cranford could not remember when he had passed a more agreeable hour.

The other two gentlemen were from down the state.

They told how they split up a month's vacation into four weeks—one in June, one in July, one in August and one in September, which, if the weather behaved itself, was the finest time of the year to fish.

All agreed upon this point. The small fry had by then taken themselves off; the big chaps began to bite, and they fought like demons.

(Continued next Saturday.)

CAMBRIDGE.

Miss Minnie Litterington of Rock Island visited this week at the home of her brother, Forest Litterington.

Mr. and Mrs. Marc R. Wood were Davenport business callers Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. Chester Kennedy and sons, John and Chester, Jr., of East Moline, visited several days at the home of Mrs. Kennedy's parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. P. Laughery.

Miss Carrie Lambert of Milan spent Wednesday at the home of her sister, Mrs. G. F. Holland.

Mr. and Mrs. Alin A. Stipp, son Ford and daughter Gloria, and Mr. and Mrs. Claus Hanson, Jr., were Sunday visitors at Davenport.

Mr. and Mrs. John Wood and son, Jack, of Moline, visited Sunday at the home of the former's brother, Marc R. Wood.

Mrs. D. F. Jones on Thursday entertained the Ladies' Aid society. There was a large attendance and a very enjoyable time was spent. At the close of the meeting the hostess served a fine lunch.

Rev. and Mrs. John V. Kennedy of Hampton visited with relatives here last week.

Ernest Dennhardt was a business caller on Friday at Rock Island.

William Gerhardt visited Sunday at Illinois City with his son, Paul, who is teaching school here.

Mrs. John Benson and daughter, Gertrude, of South Moline, visited Monday with Mrs. Alice Benson.

Mrs. John Williams and children, Le Roy and Loyd, of Austin, Minn., were entertained Tuesday at Mrs. George Kennedy's.

Prof. Stoddard visited Sunday with home folks at Atkinson, Ill.

Mrs. William Gerhardt and daughters, Margaret and Gertrude, visited Sunday with Moline relatives.

The teachers and pupils of the M. E. church Sunday school went to the woods Saturday for a wienie roast and picnic. A fine time was reported.

Mrs. Avalina Johnson has returned home from Watertown.

Mrs. Edward Beardsley and daughter Verda of East Moline visited this week at the home of her father, Charles Erdman.

Harry Olson and Eddie Carlson of Swedsburg, Iowa, Miss Mildred Swanson and Wilburt Lundahl of Rock Island were entertained at the John Fahlstrom home Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Peter Florin and family and Mr. and Mrs. Ala Olson were entertained Sunday at Moline at Alfred Lundeen's home.

Charles Belowski and family and Mrs. Gertrude Wendell of South Moline visited with relatives here Thursday.

Claus Hanson, Jr., has gone to Boone, Iowa, on a business trip.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Klerman of East Moline spent Sunday at the home of their daughter, Mrs. John Wildermuth.

Mrs. James Thompson and Mrs. C. Hanson visited at Moline Friday.

Mr. and Mrs. George Briley are visiting with relatives at Burlington, Iowa.

Mr. and Mrs. James Thompson on Sunday entertained Mr. and Mrs. David Willard of Coalton.

All the news all the time—The Argus.